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AUTHOR Brown, Freddiemae E.
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ABSTRACT

Three principle perspectives which serve as the basic rationales for the growth of alternative education since World War II are: (1) sociological--the altering of traditional formats of education in terms of organization, adaptation, socialization, and integration; (2) psychological--the belief that the student cannot be manipulated but is unique in his experience, potential, and growth rate; and (3) philosophical--the belief that the student performs best in situations of freedom from rules, constraints, and competition with peers. A corollary development to alternative education is the development of the concept of lifelong learning which emphasizes the ability for self-learning and utilization of all educative resources, formal and non-formal. There are implications for public libraries in this scheme: library specialists are needed to provide special learning experiences for pre-school children to promote attitudes favorable to lifelong learning; more formal coordination is needed between public libraries and alternative schools at the K-12 level, strengthened goals and increased federal, state, and local funding are needed for library adult literacy programs; and library support, ranging from the provision of requested materials to serving as community learning centers with special facilities and personnel, is needed by adult independent learners whether they are pursuing personal interests or enrolled in non-traditional degree programs. (MBR)

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LIFELONG LEARNING:

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

AND THE

AMERICAN PUBLIC LIBRARY

by

Freddiemae E. Brown

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LIFELONG LEARNING: ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

AND THE AMERICAN PUBLIC LIBRARY

I was invited to talk with you, the members of the Public Library Association Armed Forces Section, on the subject "alternative education." In attempts to focus on comments I could offer this afternoon, two questions immediately emerged: (1) How can one define "alternative education;" and within any derived definitions, make the content of remarks appropriate to given audience? and (2) What aspects of alternative education may be assessed to be of appropriate interest to the Armed Forces Section?

The second question which addresses the appropriateness of comments relative to alternative education for the Armed Forces Section of the Public Library Association seemed the easiest to consider. An assumption is made here that the community public library and the base library of a division of the armed forces have commonalities of goal and mission; that their clients are similar in age, economical, social, cultural, and educational diversity; and, that the librarians of both are, perforce, faced with similar responsibilities, duties, and considerations necessary to satisfy the wide array of constituent expressed and unexpressed desires for library resources, be they materialistic or programmatic. If this assumption is valid, then libraries and librarians from base operations as well as from community public libraries, have experienced the accelerating forces of educational change as these impact upon society, educational institutions, and those institutions and agencies, including public libraries, which complement and supplement the educational enterprise.

An underlying broad assumption is also made that you are concerned about public library services which may be classified as "alternative education" services because you are here and that to some of you what I shall have to say is familiar. Therefore, my comments may serve as a vehicle for us to review together what we know in order to explore the subject of "Alternative education."

The first question requires more analysis, for indeed, the accelerating changes in education have led to the adoption of the "umbrella" term "alternative education." Current rhetoric equates "alternatives in education" with open schools, optional schools, free schools, no schools, early childhood education, literary education, career education, recurrent and continuing education, adult education, and non-traditional education, among others.

These terms are often loosely and interchangeably used, although they are not necessarily inclusive, so each describes a discrete educational form or plan, it may be helpful to place them in some degrees of context and perspective in order to understand the significance of these "alternative education forms and plans as they exist and have import for public and base libraries.

Conceptual framework for alternative education:

Societal forces which evolved following World War II have had revigorating influences upon traditional American education. Basic, among these, is the exponential increase in knowledge -- knowledge epitomized in new information and techniques. The knowledge explosion has resulted in the significant technological advances which shape our daily existence. Some of this technology has been hailed by many as the approach to Utopia, or to one of the Utopias as espoused by Huxley's Brave New World, Orwell's Animal Farm, and, ironically, even Skinner's Walden Two. Although Utopia has seemed to some, to be just around the corner -- for example, evidence of rising personal expectations and vastly increased leisure time, some very dramatic paradoxes have proven the myth of such thinking.

In an age of great knowledge, there is also an age of great perplexity. Some people live on most comfortable levels; others live in most abject misery. Some nations are making great gains in prosperity; others exist on poverty levels. Millions are starving to death, while, millions of others are dying from obesity. There is dialecticalism between production and consumption; between wealth and poverty.

In the wake of this paradox, a growing public awareness of economically and educationally disadvantaged groups has evolved. This public awareness is being expressed through the experience of new individual and group lifestyles. The perplexities this phenomenon has surfaced raises questions for many about the ability to balance accelerated knowledge and skills with humanistic values.

Since education may be loosely defined as a process through which behavior -- ways of thinking, feeling acting -- changes over time, or is modified over time, it is not surprising, in view of the above commentary, that educationalists, social and cultural workers, parents and laity have taken a hard look at education and have altered conventional forms in the interest of: (1) promoting educational plans which provide opportunities for students to keep abreast of new scientific and technological skills; (2) to provide educational forms which allow for opportunities in community involvement and decision making; (3) to build opportunities for non-school educational plans which permit individual educational growth entirely free from the traditional modes; and (4) to supply avenues for those who wish to enter the educational mainspring of credentials and requisites for work, for promotion in the workplace, and for some the sake of self-fulfillment, quiet, and repose.

To extrapolate from the above, there would appear to be three principle perspectives which may serve to distinguish the basic rationales for the growth of educational alternatives: (1) sociological perspective -- education fulfills a social function. Thinkers in this area desire to alter traditional educational formats in terms of attendance, (students assume a voluntary stance toward the extent to which they take advantage of traditional school offerings); organization (students assume a more participatory stance in decision-making and division of labor in the educational enterprise); adaptation (students are involved in process -- a loosening of conventional method, time and space in the educational

structure); socialization (students' motivational and value consciousness have opportunities to develop); and, integration (students relate to others in the educational system both in formal and informal modes).

The second perspective is a psychological one. This perspective emphasizes the student as a particular entity. Those who adhere to this perspective believe the student can not be manipulated but is unique in his experience, potential and growth rate. Therefore, the student learns best in an environment of freedom, through experience, through risk-taking, cooperatively, and through his human qualities.

The third perspective is philosophical. The student performs best in situations of freedom in - freedom from rules, constraints and competition with peers for goals which only serve to enhance values of the establishment.

These three perspectives -- sociological, psychological and philosophical are not mutually exclusive, but overlap. However, reflection upon these converging vectors may serve to initiate a degree of conceptual framework for the re-emergence of some alternative educational forms and plans.

An attempt has been made to point out some major societal changes which have impacted conventional educational approaches and, further, how these may be categorized in three interrelated perspectives -- sociological, psychological, and philosophical, as determinants for various alternative educational forms.

To simplify the conceptual framework, it may be useful to view these perspectives as: (1) Access and Remediation (Sociological) (2) Individual Difference (Psychological) (3) Time, place, pace (Philosophical). Again, it is re-emphasized that these three forces are not discrete but overlap in focus and in implementation of the alternative approaches and formats.[1]

From this conceptual framework, such plans as open schools, optional schools, free schools, and career education have evolved, particularly, for students in elementary and secondary levels.

Concept of Lifelong Learning:

An important corollary development to the growth of alternatives in education has been the evolving concept of Lifelong Learning. Lifelong Learning, another term which does not have a universally precise definition, may be defined as:

> ... an evolving concept. It represents a new perspective or attitude toward learneres and learning throughout the life cycle. Lifelong learning not only includes a vertical time dimension -- literally from birth to death but also a horizontal dimension that reflects the personal growth needs of human beings for self-expression and dignity. It emphasizes the ability for self-learning and utilization of all educative resources, formal and non-formal.[2]

Although the emphasis on the concept of lifelong learning is in the spectrum of adult independent learning, most writers concieve the concept of consisting of three basic stages; (1) pre-school or early education, elementary and secondary education; (2) post-secondary education -- college education; and (3) continuing education -- the major portion of lifelong learning for adults.

It is to be noted at this point that the terms students and education have been replaced by those of learners and learning. This is significant as the concept of lifelong learning involves more than schools and schooling, more than rewards and credentials, more than economic development. It also incorporates the broader aims of knowing one's own self and search for personal unity, and understanding fellow human beings and the environment.

Educational reforms, as these have rapidly evolved, amy be considered part of the lifelong learning concept. They represent varying approaches toward inculcating the ideal of lifelong learning ... (the) "temper, a quality of society, that evinces itself in attitudes, in relationships, and in social organization."[3] Lifelong learning, then, has a grand design, mission, or goal, it has a variety of objectives, which assume priority according to individual needs, and has various options, expressed in alternative education plans and forms for individuals to work toward the goal.

Implications for Public Libraries: Early Childhood Education

As the present emphasis on Lifelong Learning revolves around the adult inde-

pendent learner, remarks will similarly focus upon this segment of the learning force. However, I take this opportunity for us to briefly look at Early Childhood Education and educational alternatives existing for K-12 students.

The public library may rightfully pride itself on the successful services rendered to pre-school audiences. Materials, programs, and librarians with special training in Children's Work, have made "pre-school story hours" one of the most viable and valued aspects of public library service. Lifelong Learning, however, places new dimensions into Early Childhood Education. The premise is that children, beginning with those as young as two and one-half years, should be provided a special type of learning experience--both cognitive and affective -- a learning experience which initiates an attitude toward the necessity and value of learning throughout life. Teacher education units are planning new and special approaches to Early Childhood Education. The public library should, perhaps, keep abreast of these developments in this area and attempt to link with agencies operating toward the goal of augmenting, at this early stage, knowledge of and appreciation for the dual aspects of learning throughout life. This linkage calls for specialists who can:

1) Establish rapport with children and parents

2) Demonstrate knowledge of a diversity of learning resources appropriate for young children

3) Employ effective methods in introducing children to the use of media for learning and recreation, and

4) Perform effectively in a leadership role in the learning programs of a variety of community agencies.[4]

In an effort to encompass the above philosophy, the School of Library Science at North Carolina Central University, Durham, has initiated as part of its curriculum, an Early Childhood Library Specialist Program. Significant components of this program include a course in Parent Education and School/Community Relationships, and practicum course allowing library school students to work with students, parents, and community agencies.[5]

Doubtlessly, there are other programs within library education and within the field which can be cited to illustrate efforts to enrich and to enlarge Early Childhood Education from the stance of the Lifelong Learning concept. This is just one example which has some fresh import.

Implications for Public Libraries: K-12 Alternative Schools

The alternative movement in the grades K-12 spectrum, has been fairly rapid over the last 10 to 15 years. The degree of public library involvement with the various forms -- alternative school within schools, optional schools, free schools -- has not been subject to much research. In an informal investigation of a small sample of alternative schools in the Metropolitan Detroit area, it was discovered that there was little encouraging evidence of special effort made by public libraries in the sample school communities to seek out the schools and to offer them library support. Conversely, some schools in the sample, placed little emphasis upon utilization of the community public library. In two instances, one of which is a school-within-a-school, no emphasis was made to utilize the existing school library facility. Some of the variables included in the study are: type of alternative school, program focus, student age level and total census, staffing patterns, and geographical location (Detroit, suburb, and type of suburb by socio/economic levels). Expected results emerged. There was high correlation of school/public library cooperation in the middle/upper class suburbs and zero cooperation in one Detroit program. There were favorable attitudes toward both school and public libraries expressed by alternative school administrators and, on the other hand, statements reflecting negative attitudes. One school commented upon the decidedly "unwelcome" attitude on the part of the public library when it was approached for the program's support.

The broad conclusions and recommendations of this investigation are:

1) The need to replace desultory cooperative efforts with a more formal coordinative effort.

2) The need for joint research and pilot projects on coordination of services between school and public libraries.

3) The need for inclusion of librarians, representatives from other relevant agencies, and lay people in enacting such research and fostering such projects.

4) The need for a community-wide communication network constructed to promote coordination between the alternative school and the public library.

5) The need to initiate planning for this coordination in a systematic approach; and, finally,

6) The need for continuing education programs for librarians.[6]

Implications for Public Libraries: Literacy Programs

Historically, sociologically, and theoretically both school and public libraries are concerned with providing universal services. However, the large number of illiterate adults in the United States highlights the grave disparity between theory and delivery of full, effective services. It is not necessary for us to review the high successes public libraries experienced since 1900 in their adult education programs, for we can point these out with justification.

The successes of the schools have paralled those of public libraries. For both institutions, notable programs to promote literacy have basically developed in response to national crises which interfered with maintenance of tradition. Further, there has not been an appreciable degree of cooperation between school literacy programs and public library support of these programs.

In its Annual Report, Vol. II, the Appalachian Adult Education Center presents clear evidence, accompanied by rationale, disappointing public library and school coordination efforts during its demonstration project with adult illiterates. Yet, the report recommends that coordination would infinitely enhance services for adult illiterates. The report concludes that there is both a demonstrated urgency by both instiuttions to meet literacy needs and obstacles can be overcome.

The AAEC Report addresses itself to the following specific program component needs: strengthening of goals, increased levels of federal, state, and local

funding, specialized training of personnel to work with literacy programs, and augmented cooperation of local governments. With these improvements, literacy programs would assume a more universal and viable stance in the grand design of Lifelong Learning?

Implications for Public Libraries: "Informal" Adult Independent Learning

It is virtually impossible to assess the number of adults who engage in learning projects which do not culminate in formal education credits. These learning projects may be broadly conceived as those which represent efforts of the adult learner to satisfy needs ranging from those of survival to self-fullfillment. Categories cover a continuum from public affairs to general education. Some broad categories are general education -- from adult basic education to graduate level courses, vocational subjects, hobbies and recreation, and family living, personal development, religion, and civics and public affairs. The number of persons who take a class or a series of classes within these broad categories without any reward in the form of educational credit, is obviously difficult to determine.

A 1972 study conducted by Carp, Peterson and Roelfs has some value in this regard. The study group, utilizing a representative national sample of 104 million persons aged 18 to 60, living in private households, in the continental United States, and who were not full-time students found:

1) Of this sample 31% had participated in sequential learning activity during the previous year -- these are labelled Learners.

2) Of this sample 77% indicated there was something they would like to learn -- these are labelled Would-Be-Learners.

3) Of the Would-Be-Learners, only 17% desired college credit with over 50% who would be satisfied either with no credit or with a certificate of satisfactory completion.

4) Of the Learners, 42% pursued hobbies and recreational subjects: 35% vocational skills, and only 25% studied general academic subjects.

Inferences which may be made from this study are: (1) There is a marked interest among Learners and Would-Be-Learners in learning projects related to such categories as hobbies and recreation, home and family living, personal

development, religion, and public affairs.

(2) While the interest in college credit and degrees exists, this interest is probably pertinent to those Learners and Would-Be-Learners who have some postsecondary education and who rank in relatively high socio/economic levels.

(3) To focus programs on those which award credit and degrees will exclude from the learning process an appreciable number of Learners and Would-Be-Learners.

(4) Only 14% of the Learners pursued studies on college campuses; only 21% of the Would-Be-Learners wanted to study at a college or university.[8]

Implications for Public Libraries: "Formal" Adult Independent Learning

It is noted here that the term "non-traditional" education has not been utilized thus far in our review. This was a deliberate omission. As much of the literature concerning alternative education in the postsecondary spectrum employ "Non-Tradional" as nomenclature, it was felt that a definition would be most effective in the review of formal adult independent learning. A caveat is important here as often the terms alternative education, open education, and "non-traditional" education are used interchangeably.

Non-traditional education may be best defined as "more an attitude than a system;"[8]

> This attitude puts the student first and the institution second, concentrates more on the former's needs than the latter's convenience, encourages diversity of individual opportunity rather than uniform prescription, and deemphasizes time, space, and even course requirements in favor of competence and, where applicable, performance. It has concern for the learner of any age or circumstance, for the degree aspirant as well as the person who finds sufficient reward in enriching life through constant, periodic, or occasional study.[10]

We are all familiar with the tremendous increase in non-traditional degree programs in the area of postsecondary education. Non-traditional degree programs exist on a continuum from credit earned through off-campus and extension centers, credit earned through television, newspaper, cassettes, and radio bases, to credit earned through life experience. The underlying basis for granting formal credit is the learner's ability to pass examination. Some learners are affiliated

with traditional educational enterprises, some with private business enterprises, some with the Armed Forces. Some learners conduct the totality of their learning projects from their homes and receive credit through such agencies as the Empire State College in New York State and the New York Regents' External Degree Program which are experimental colleges offering non-traditional learning modes solely through office-like facilities. For learners opting for any of these modes, there is need for basic information regarding choice, access, appropriate materials, as well as, for some, a need for study space.

The community public library has been signalled out as a logical center to provide response to these needs. Some public libraries have already initiated supportive efforts for non-traditional porgrams. We are all aware of the Office For Independent Study and Guidance Projects, a consortium of public libraries and the State of New York. This national project, funded jointly by the Council of Library Resources, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the U.S. Office of Education, Division of Library Programs, and the College Entrance Examination Board, has been sucessfully demonstrating ways in which public libraries can plan new services to support and to encourage adults in their learning efforts. These programs vary according to goals set by the library systems as these reflect community needs, so that some include non-credit as well as credit components.

On a somewhat smaller scale, there are numerous other programs across the nation such as the College Without Walls (St. Clair Shores, Michigan), a College Level Entrance Preparation degree-awarding program; the Weekend College Program cooperative program between Wayne State University, College of Lifelong Learning and 10 branch library units of the Detroit Public Library; and the CLEP and/or Weekend College Programs carried on by the member libraries of Wayne Oakland Federated Library System here in the Metropolitan Detroit area.

Reports from public libraries involved in these various programs, indicate the following major needs and concerns. These needs and concerns vary according to the library's philosophical commitment to its role in dependent learning. Utilizing Margaret Monroe's philosophic spectrum for public libraries to determine their involvement in independent learning, these needs and concerns can be made more graphic.[10]

1. Libraries which choose to provide only materials requested by adult independent learners will have needs and concerns relating to the acquisition and organization of these materials and appropriate special facilities for these.

2. Libraries which choose to collaborate with other agencies, organizations, and institutions in supporting adult independent learning will have needs and concerns of an informational and referral nature such as appropriate telephone, meeting room and display facilities, and specialists who have counseling skills.

3. Libraries which choose to broaden their support of adult independent learning services -- to serve as a community learning center will have needs and concerns relative to provision of multi-media materials, appropriate special facilities, and specialists trained in media as well as in counseling.

4. Libraries which choose the most liberal approach on Monroe's philosophical spectrum -- that of a center for a learning society will have needs and concerns to acquire, organize, interpret, and deliver the whole range of materials, facilities, and personnel to support independent learning.

Summary:

Through reviewing some of the alternative approaches to education by broad type of category, as these comprise the grand design of Lifelong Learning, some implications for public libraries were made:

1) When we considered Early Childhood Education, we perceived the need for specialists in this area and alluded to the role of the library schools in fulfilling this need.

2) When we discussed the alternative movement in the K-12 educational unit, we considered the need for coordination between school and public librarians, relevant agencies, and lay people in planning programs; need for a communitywide communication network; and, the need for continuing education programs for librarians.

3) When we reviewed, briefly, adult literacy programs, we expressed the need for strengthening of goals and increased funding from federal, state, and local levels.

4) When we looked at "informal" adult independent learning programs, we underscored the need for loosening barriers of access, costs, time, and place.

5) When we briefly analyzed the "formal" adult independent learner, we preceived the complexity of needs ranging from philosophical determination of program focus, and attendant concerns relative to materials, facilities, and personnel.

None of these needs and concerns which have implications for public libraries-which are now or which desire to become involved with any of the alternative education approaches we have reviewed this afternoon, are revolutionary or new. All of us have grappled with one or more of these, and will continue to do so.

What is new and bright for us, is the fact that we are now initiating the Alternative Education Programs Section (AEPS) within the Public Library Association Division. Let each of us assume a committed and active role in this new section so that we may take positive steps toward placing the public library in the avant garde in fulfilling the mission of Lifelong Learning.

Freddiemae E. Brown, Assistant Professor, Wayne State University
Presentation for Public Library Association, Armed Forces Division
American Library Association, Annual Conference, Detroit, Michigan, June 17, 1977.

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